



Klamath Network Featured Creature

October 2006

Black-backed Woodpecker (*Picoides arcticus*)

FIELD NOTES:

General Description:

The Black-backed woodpecker is a medium sized woodpecker (~9 inches). Adults have solid black upperparts and white underparts, heavily barred with black on sides and flanks. Males have a prominent yellow patch on the center of their crown. Juveniles are similar to the adults but may be less lustrous and the yellow crown of the male is smaller or absent. Plumages stay similar throughout the year. Similar to the Three-toed woodpecker (*Picoides tridactylus*) they have 3 toes on each foot: 2 directed forward and the third directed backward.

Breeding:

Nest building typically begins between April and June. They tend to nest in live and dead trees of various species including hardwood and conifer species. In several cases, the bark of the tree is peeled back around the nest cavity exposing the sapwood. Clutch sizes range from 2-6 eggs on average and fledging time is approximately 25 days.

Feeding:

The diet of the Black-backed woodpecker is comprised primarily wood-boring beetles, engraver beetles, and mountain pine beetles of the Cerambycidae and Buprestidae families. In addition, weevils, ants, insects, spiders, and wild fruit have been found in their diets. Individuals will forage on the trunks of conifer trees and logs and slowly climb up and down a tree pecking, gleaning or scaling for insects.

Habitat:

Black-backed woodpeckers can be found throughout boreal and montane conifer forests of North America but specific habitat associations are dependent on the geographic area. The species' dependence on fire and other large-scale disturbance events is well documented in the literature. Large increases in numbers can occur during or after a disturbance event such as a wood boring beetle outbreak or fire.

Where to see it in the Klamath Parks:

Species lists from the National I&M Program's NPSpecies database show records of the species occurring in Crater Lake National Park, Lassen Volcanic National Park, and Lava Beds National Monument.



Distribution:

The species range includes large portions of Canada and southern Alaska down to western Montana, northern Idaho and Wyoming, the Black Hills of South Dakota, and the northern (boreal forest) portions of Wisconsin, Michigan, New Hampshire, Vermont, New York, and Maine. The species also occupies portions of the Cascade and Blue mountains of Washington and Oregon south to the Klamath and Modoc regions of northern California.

Predators:

Birds of prey such as the Cooper's hawk, Goshawk, and Great Gray owl are potential predators of Black-backed woodpecker. Nest predation can occur by a number of arboreal species which can access the nest, including chickarees, weasels, and corvids.

Interesting Fact to Ponder:

The Black-backed woodpecker is apparently absent from the central and southern Rocky Mountains, while the very similar Three-toed woodpecker ranges into isolated populations of Arizona and New Mexico. However, on the Pacific Coast, the Three-toed rarely occurs as far southward as southern Oregon, while the Black-backed has been recorded as far south as the Sierra Nevada range.

Additional Information:

<http://bna.birds.cornell.edu/BNA/Login.do>

<http://www.prbo.org/calpif/htmldocs/species/conifer/bbwaoacct.html>